

VZCZCXRO0590
OO RUEHBI RUEHLMC
DE RUEHLM #0860/01 2551143
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 111143Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8655
INFO RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4529
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2260
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1252
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0158
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3601
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8681
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6105
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 0749
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0795
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2927
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000860

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA, SCA/INS, SCA/RA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR REVIEWS US CONCERNS REGARDING SITUATION
IN NORTH WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a September 11 meeting, the Ambassador briefed the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Bogollogama on US concerns regarding the rapidly evolving situation in northern Sri Lanka. He expressed concern that the Government Agents would not be able to replace the UN in managing the massive relief effort to internally displaced people in the north, and urged the GSL to work with the UN on a back-up plan. He flagged that with no UN agencies to monitor the distribution of US assistance in the north, US humanitarian assistance may be in jeopardy. He urged the GSL to issue leaflets or public statements to encourage IDPs to move south to Government-controlled areas and reassure them they will not be subjected to human rights abuses or lengthy confinement in camps. The Ambassador said it would be extremely important for the Government to ensure the safety of the IDPs while they remain in the north and for the military to exercise maximum restraint in using bombs and artillery in areas populated by civilians. He urged progress towards a political package and human rights to reassure Tamils in the north they will have a place of dignity and respect in a unified Sri Lanka. The Minister thanked the Ambassador for his frank but helpful suggestions and promised to convey them to the President. In response to the Minister's question, the Ambassador confirmed the US would host an informal Co-Chair meeting during the UN General Assembly meeting and that no public statement is planned. End Summary.

Back Up Plan Needed if GA's Can't Manage

¶2. (C) The Minister began by asking the Ambassador's assessment in the north. The Ambassador responded that the U.S. and others are concerned that the Government Agents (GAs) in the North do not have the capacity to deliver and administer food and non-food humanitarian relief to what will likely be a fast-growing and fast-moving population of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Vanni. The Ambassador warned the Minister that one of the unintended consequences of the departure of the UN and international

NGOs is that there would no longer be independent assessments of the situation on the ground, which will leave the door open to the LTTE to exaggerate for political purposes the humanitarian situation. The Ambassador suggested that if the humanitarian situation reaches a crisis situation that the GAS can not manage, the GSL should have a back-up plan in place that they have developed in consultation with the UN to reinsert the UN and possibly some of the INGOs with long experience in the Vanni to help the GAS manage the situation.

US Humanitarian Assistance May Be Jeopardized

13. (C) With respect to U.S. assistance to IDPs in the Vanni, the Ambassador flagged for the Minister that with the departure of the World Food Program and other UN agencies, the UN would not be able to monitor the delivery of U.S. humanitarian assistance in the North which might oblige us to cease such assistance. The U.S. was now examining how monitoring might be accomplished. The Ambassador reassured the Minister that the U.S. would be able to provide funding for food and non-food humanitarian assistance to those IDPs who are able to move South into Government-controlled areas. However, most IDPs are reluctant to move South in part because the LTTE won't let them, but also because they fear they will be subject to human rights abuses and possible quasi-internment in Government camps in the south. He urged that the Government use the media and leaflets to issue public assurances to the IDPs that if they move south they will not be fired on by the Sri Lankan military, they will

COLOMBO 00000860 002 OF 003

not be subject to human right abuses, and they and their families will be allowed to remain together and receive care from UN agencies in camps established for them in Vavunya. The Government should also make it clear that they will make every effort to resettle them as quickly as possible in the North in accordance with international standards. Lastly, the Ambassador said it would be extremely important for the Government to ensure the safety of the IDPs while they remain in the north and that the military exercise maximum restraint in using bombs and artillery in areas populated by civilians. The Minister thanked the Ambassador for his frank, but helpful suggestions. He promised to convey these to the President. He also promised that the military would continue to exercise restraint so as to minimize civilian casualties.

Need for Political Package Now

14. (C) The Ambassador urged the Foreign Minister to support putting forward a political package that would be meaningful for the Tamils, Muslims, and others. By moving such a package now, the Government might help persuade some of the LTTE to give up, some IDPs to move south into Government-controlled areas, and it would help promote national reconciliation. The Minister responded that the proposals developed by the All Parties Representative Committee (APRC) and the President's efforts to devolve power under the 13th Amendment represented a significant package. The Ambassador responded respectfully that there had been no movement on the APRC in more than a year, while there had been scant visible progress in devolving power to the provincial councils under the 13th Amendment. The Minister somewhat defensively responded that while the political environment did not permit the President to go beyond the 13th Amendment, the President was making substantial efforts to devolve responsibilities to the provinces. He cited as an example responsibilities that had been devolved in his home of the North Central Province where he argued that responsibility for roads, health, education, and agrarian services had been substantially devolved.

15. (C) The Ambassador took the example of agrarian services to respond that most Sri Lankans he had spoken with felt that the agricultural ministries in Colombo were not willing to

devolve the money and control over agrarian services to the provinces because of the loss of power and patronage such devolution would entail. If indeed power was being devolved the Government needs to do a much better job of explaining how this is so, since even the experts on devolution are skeptical. In closing the Ambassador returned to his original point that the Government had to articulate a package of political proposals that would give Tamils assurance that they will enjoy a future of hope and dignity within a united Sri Lanka and substantial control over most matters in areas in which they would predominate. The Minister took the point.

Need For Human Rights Progress

16. (C) Just as progress on a political package would be important for reassuring Tamils, so would progress on human rights, the Ambassador urged. He remarked that a quick end to the conflict would likely bring a decline in the levels of abductions and extrajudicial killings as there is a historically strong correlation between these and the levels of fighting. Similarly the end of fighting would likely bring an improvement in media freedom since most of the actions that have been taken against individual journalists were done in retaliation for their independent reporting on the military situation. The Ambassador suggested that progress on impunity would also be essential. Prosecutions

COLOMBO 00000860 003 OF 003

in the two most high profile Commission of Inquiry cases -- the killing of 17 Action Contre le Faim workers and the five youths in Trincomalee -- would be a good start. Similarly, if Government remains opposed to a monitoring presence by the UN Commission for Human Rights, it is incumbent upon the Government to strengthen its own Human Rights Commission so it can credibly reassure the human rights community that the HRC can perform the monitoring and reporting functions that the UNHCHR mission envisions. The Minister acknowledged these are important priorities but provided no indication of any progress in any of the areas.

Co-Chairs Meeting at UNGA

17. (C) The Minister told the Ambassador he would be leaving the following week for meetings in Brazil and then at the UNGA. He asked if the Co-Chairs plan to meet during UNGA. The Ambassador confirmed that the Co-Chairs do plan to meet informally, but do not envision issuing a press statement.
BLAKE